

A conversation with the Hawk

by Greg Dennis

In his grey rattlesnake-skin boots, wide-brimmed black cowboy hat, and brushed leather belt emblazoned with a huge H on the biggest buckle I've ever seen, Ken Harrelson looks as though he'd be more at home at a cattle auction than a gathering of famous athletes and media hacks.

First impressions would deceive the unknowing as Harrelson, formerly a slugging outfielder for the Boston Red Sox and California Angels, now the voice of the Sox on cable TV, is a much sought-after personality on the sports dinner circuit.

Articulate, witty, candid, and above all, one of the most respected baseball minds in the business, Harrelson was back in Halifax by popular demand. For the second consecutive year, he was the master of ceremony at the annual Kingsmeadow Sports Banquet, which included at its head table this year, among others, Bobby Orr, Gary Carter, Matt Cavanaugh and Jocelyn Bourassa.

Everyone calls him the Hawk; not because of the keen, piercing eyes that allowed him to artfully catch spinning fastballs with the fat part of his bat; not because of the seemingly lazy yet graceful way he glided under fly balls; but rather for the prodigious nose that comes straight out off his tanned face then bends down—much like a tree root does when its growth is impeded by a wall. Looking slightly bedraggled from being chased by the hounds around the press room in the Hotel Nova Scotian, Harrelson, nonetheless, kindly accepted another interview and in it was his usual frank self.

The man knows his baseball

—no doubt about it. And if you're a Red Sox fan, said the Hawk, it's going to be a long, long summer. Dyed-in-the-wool fans may wish the 1980 season were cancelled. Don't laugh—they may get their wish.

"To have two players like this and to trade them is lunacy. . ."



Baseball is perhaps North America's only 12 month a year sport.

Primarily, this is because the off-season wheeling and dealings attract so much interest, the baseball aficionado never loses track of the game. Free agency—curse it, you conservatives—has much to do with this.

"I think free agency enhances the game of baseball," said the Hawk in his familiar down-south drawl. "You'll always hear that (free agency is ruining baseball) from the guys who sign the cheques. I think it's just the opposite. It's like a business—you can only look at the bottom line. The last three years baseball has

broken its own attendance record each year."

"People are enamored by numbers. They really are. People will go to see Dave Winfield even if they don't like him, even if they go to boo him. They're gonna pay the

five or six bucks for a ticket to go see a guy who's making \$1 million, 300 thousand a year plus."

Can baseball players really be worth that much money? Winfield's contract with the New York Yankees will pay him approximately \$1 per minute.

They are worth it, Harrelson said. "The cheapest ballplayer you have is the guy who is making the most money—if he earns it. I don't care what the situation is, what the circumstances are, a good ballplayer will always make his money. It's the fringe ballplayer who makes two or three thousand dollars and doesn't earn it that are the killers."

"I think free agency is just in its infancy. I really believe that. Everyone thinks it's gonna level off. I'm just the opposite. I think within the next 15 to 20 years, you're gonna see a guy making \$10 million a year."

Harrelson said baseball could afford it, pointing out the fact most baseball clubs turn handsome profits. Baseball, it has been said, runs itself better than the owners do. The fans would not be made to suffer escalated ticket prices, he said, because of pay TV. Ultimately though, having people sitting at home instead of at the park will hurt the game. "Up until then, though, things will flourish."

Meanwhile, the battle over free agency continues. Owners are demanding compensation for players they lose in the market while the players argue compensation would greatly restrict their freedom of movement. Last year the season came within a whisker of a strike before a shadow settlement was reached. The compensation issue is still up in the air and Harrelson says his "gut reac-

ATHLETES OF THE WEEK



CAROL ROSENTHALL—women's basketball—led the Tigers to a pair of impressive wins over St. F.X. Coach Carolyn Savoy feels Rosenthal, a graduate physical education student and two-time All Canadian, has been the leader on the club, handling the backcourt general role in a season where a large number of rookies must be blended with the three veterans on the team. Last week, Rosenthal had 26 points in the two games and set up many baskets.



PHIL PERRIN—men's volleyball—after last week's letdown in the Dalhousie Volleyball Classic, the Tigers needed a lift and Perrin provided that lift in a two match sweep of University of Moncton in AUAA play. Perrin, captain of the Tigers last year and the team's MVP, came off a weakening illness to lead the Tigers with 26 kills, 13 blocking points and three ace serves in the two matches. The Truro native is a second year commerce student.

tion" tells him "there is a better chance (of a strike) this year than last. I can't tell you why. But I know one thing; if I were the players, I would just fight like hell to keep what I have because they've got it all going their way."

Harrelson's affinity with the Boston Red Sox goes back years. He wears a humongous ring on his left pinkie as a reminder of the Sox pennant winning year in 1967. He

ate that it was a good deal, they gotta be fools. Anyone who says the deal (Burlison, Lynn and Steve "non-descript factor" Renko for Carney Langsford, Rick Miller, Mark Clear, Jim Dorsey, Joe Rudi and Frank Tanana) was equitable, that the deal was good, doesn't know what he's talking about."

Catcher Carleton Fisk has also announced his intention to sell his services to the

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played with them for over a decade and has been in the broadcast booth for another six years. He has seen the team through good times and lean times. Nineteen eighty-one will not be one of the former. Harrelson is especially pessimistic because owners Hayward Sullivan and Buddy LaRoux traded Rick Burlison and Fred Lynn after the two superstars threatened to test the free agent pool if salary demands were not met.

"You wait and dream about players like this coming down the pike. I mean it's like a dream, the ship coming in. To have two players like this and to trade them out of weakness and desperation is lunacy in my opinion. It's crazy. You don't trade the best players in the game unless you get virtually a franchise for them."

"If they even try to insinu-

highest bidder if the Red Sox do not meet his salary request. Harrelson said that from a public relations and talent standpoint, Sullivan and LaRoux had better sign him. "They have spun a web in a corner that they can't get out of. It would be inconceivable to me to lose within the space of a couple of months Fred Lynn, Rick Burlison and Carleton Fisk."

So where in the American League East Division does the voice of the Sox and admittedly one of their biggest fans think the Beaners will finish the season?

"If I had to pick the Red Sox right now, I'd have to pick them sixth."

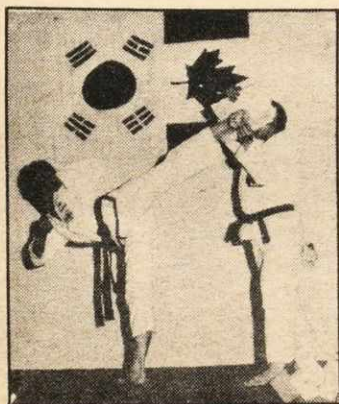
Sixth?

"Sixth."

Well, at least they'll finish ahead of the Blue Jays."

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